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ABSTRACT

The present study explored the dynamics of expectancy effects. The process by which labels about children provided to adults (but not to the children themselves) achieve their outcomes was investigated. Forty-eight undergraduate females were provided with information about children whom they were to instruct; each undergraduate was then individually video taped, while alone, presenting rules for a task which would assess the child's delay of gratification. The information provided beforehand focused on the age and on the patience or friendliness of the child who would view the tape. Instructors who were told that the child was patient were more likely to read the rules verbatim than were instructors given the task-irrelevant label about the child. Further, for instructors expecting a 5-year-old to view their tape, those told that the child was patient took more time initially presenting the rules than did those told nothing about the child's patience. For instructors expecting a 10-year-old to view their tape, those told that the child was patient took significantly less time presenting the rules than did instructors told nothing about the child's patience. The instructors' predictions of their child's self-control were affected by the supposed age of the child but were not affected by the label. In addition, these predictions were not related to any behavior the instructors demonstrated on the video tape. (Author/MP)

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The Effects of Child Age and Label
on Instructor Expectation and Performance

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Abstract

The present study explored the dynamics of expectancy effects. The process by which labels about children provided to adults (but not to the children themselves) achieves its outcome was investigated. Adults were provided with information about children whom they were to instruct. These adults were then individually video taped (while alone) presenting rules for a task which would assess the child's delay of gratification. The information provided beforehand focused on the age and on the patience or friendliness of the child who would view the tape.

Instructors told that the child was patient were more likely to read the rules verbatim than were instructors given the task-irrelevant label about the child. Further, for instructors expecting a 5-year-old to view their tape, those told that the child was patient took more time initially presenting the rules than did those told nothing about the child's patience. For instructors expecting a 10-year-old to view their tape, those told that the child was patient took significantly less time presenting the rules than did instructors told nothing about the child's patience. The instructors' predictions of their child's self-control were affected by the supposed age of the child but were not affected by the label. In addition, these predictions were not related to any behavior the instructors demonstrated on the video tape. A jury of other adults who reviewed the tapes based their own predictions of child performance on a number of observable behaviors displayed on the instructional tapes. Thus the present study demonstrated that information provided to adults about a child beforehand can influence both their expectations and their performance when interacting with the child.

The Effects of Child Age and Label
on Instructor Expectation and Performance

In two recent investigations, researchers have noted that the child's ability to postpone immediate gratification can be significantly influenced by what others say to the child about that child's expected performance. Toner, Moore and Emmons (1980) investigated the effect of an adult telling the first-grade child beforehand that the child is "patient" on that child's subsequent waiting behavior. Children so labeled waited significantly longer before taking accumulating candy rewards than did children not given the task-relevant label. Ritchie and Toner (1981) have recently found that even preschoolers are affected by such labeling. Further, these researchers found that labels about the children's patience provided to testers (but not to the children) also significantly influenced the children's subsequent delay behavior, but only when the children themselves were not directly provided with a relevant label.

With the demonstrated outcome of direct (to the child) and indirect (to the tester) labeling, several issues of theoretical and practical significance related to the process causing the outcome remained to be addressed. First, when labels regarding a child's probable behavior are given to the tester but not to the child, how does this information affect tester behavior and expectancy and thus exert influence on the child's behavior? Second, are tester expectation and performance influenced by the age of the target child? The present study was designed and executed to shed further light on the dynamics of expectancy effects.

Method

Forty-eight undergraduate females served as instructors. Each instructor performed on a two-minute video tape which, she was told, was to serve as the instructional tape to be shown to an individual boy before he engaged in a task assessing his self-imposed delay of gratification. The task involved the child's waiting for accumulating candy rewards, the possession of which was made contingent upon the child's stopping further accumulation. Separately taped, each instructor was told to convey the rules of the task to the child in whatever manner she wished. Explicit rules for the delay task were provided on an index card placed in front of each instructor prior to the taping. Half of the instructors were told beforehand that the particular child who would see their tape was quite patient when involved in similar delay tasks. The other half of the instructors were given a task-irrelevant label (regarding the friendliness of the child) prior to making the instructional tape. Further, half of the instructors were told that their target child was five years old while the remainder were told that their target child was ten years old. Each instructor then presented the rules while seated alone at a table facing the camera.

When the taping was completed, each instructor was asked to predict how long their target child would likely delay gratification after he viewed their instructional tape. All 48 individual tapes were then subjected to two separate reviews. First, each tape was presented to a "jury" of ten undergraduates who were unaware of the age and label manipulations and who independently predicted how long the target child

for each tape would likely wait. The second review involved a specific behavioral examination of the taped performances of the instructors by two raters who were unaware of the information which had been provided to the instructors about the children. Specific instructor behaviors recorded by these two raters included (1) whether the rules of the delay task were presented verbatim from the index card, (2) the length of time used to initially present the rules, (3) the total amount of time the instructor spoke, (4) the number of questions posed by the instructor, (5) the amount of instructor gazing at camera, and (6) the amount of instructor smiling.

Results

Regarding specific behaviors displayed on the instructional tapes, instructors told beforehand that the child who would see their tape was "patient" were more likely to read the rules of the task verbatim than were instructors given the task-irrelevant label about the child, $F(1,44)=5.67$, $p<.025$. Of the 24 instructors making a tape for a child they were told was "patient", ten read the rules verbatim from the index card. Of the 24 instructors making tapes for a child they were not told was "patient," only three read the rules verbatim.

Regarding the length of time used by instructors to initially present the rules of the delay task, there was an interaction between information provided to the instructors about the viewer's age and about the viewer's patience, $F(1,44)=11.24$, $p<.002$. For the instructors of five-year-olds, those told the child was "patient" took an average of 42.0 seconds to initially present the rules, while those told the child was "friendly"

took an average of 31.8 seconds to initially present the rules. For the instructors of the older children, the pattern was reversed. Those instructing a "patient" ten-year-old child took an average of 30.8 seconds, while those instructing a "friendly" ten-year-old child took an average of 41.7 seconds to initially present the rules of the delay of gratification task.

Instructor prediction of subsequent child performance was affected by the supposed age of the child, $F(1,44)=4.42$, $p<.05$. Instructors of ten-year-olds predicted that the children would wait an average of 450 seconds while those instructing five-year-olds predicted an average of 340 seconds of delay.

The jury of ten undergraduates who viewed all of the tapes also were influenced in their predictions of child delay behavior by the supposed age of the child even though the child's age was not provided to the jury but only to the instructors, $F(1,44)=19.93$, $p<.001$. The jury predicted an average of 305 seconds of delay for children who would see tapes made by instructors expecting a ten-year-old viewer. The jury predicted only 185 seconds of delay from children who would see tapes made by instructors expecting a five-year-old viewer.

The instructors' predictions were significantly correlated with the jury's predictions ($r=.292$, $p<.05$). However, while the instructors' predictions were not related to any of the actual behaviors they had displayed on video tape, the jury's predictions were significantly correlated with several overt instructor behaviors. The jury prediction of delay of gratification in viewing children was significantly related

to whether the rules were presented verbatim ($r=.302$, $p<.05$), to the length of time that the instructor took to initially present the rules ($r=.437$, $p<.01$), to the total amount of time that the instructor spoke during the two-minute video tape ($r=.623$, $p<.01$), to the total number of questions that the instructor asked ($r=.315$, $p<.01$), to the amount of time that the instructor looked directly at the camera ($r=.244$, $p<.05$) and to the amount of smiling displayed by the instructor ($r=.280$, $p<.05$).

Discussion

The present study demonstrated that task-relevant information provided to adults beforehand about a child's characteristics affects how these adults behave toward the child and information about the child's age influenced the instructors' expectations regarding that child's subsequent self-control performance. While the provision of the label relevant to the self-control task did not affect stated instructor expectations, this label did affect both the form and duration of adult instructional behavior directed toward the child. Further, unlike the adult instructors themselves, a jury of independent observers of the adults' performance based their predictions of subsequent child performance on a number of specific, observable instructor behaviors.

In conclusion, the manner in which "indirect" labeling of children achieves its outcome by altering adult expectations and observable behaviors has been further clarified. However, an important element in the dynamics of label-influenced interaction remains to be investigated. The present study focused exclusively on the reactions of adults to labels

about children. It is now appropriate to study the influence of various instructional behaviors and expectations, determined in part by labels, on the subsequent reactions of children. It is necessary to study this influence on both the ability of the children to comprehend the content of the instruction (i.e., the child's subsequent knowledge and understanding of the rules) and on the ability and/or willingness of children who have been subjected to the adult instruction to display self-control on the task assessing their delay of gratification behavior. Such an investigation is presently underway.

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